

"the withered arm" by
thomas hardy and
"the test" by henry
sleaser essay sample



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“ The Withered Arm” by Thomas Hardy and “ The Test” by Henry Sleser Essay Sample

Written in the nineteenth century and set in rural Wessex, “ The Withered Arm” tells a tale about a poor middle aged woman named Rhoda Brook. Rhoda previously had a child with a rich landowner named Mr. Lodge. But because of the huge difference in class Mr. Lodge left her and never looked back. Over the next twelve years Rhoda lived her life as an outsider, simply because she was a single mother. Rhoda earned her living as a milk maid, it was here where she overheard Mr. lodge was getting married.

She overhears many things about this woman “ Gertrude”, and finds herself hating her before she even meets her. One night she had a nightmare about her, she ends up grabbing Gertrude’s arm and then waking up. Surprisingly when Rhoda first actually meets Gertrude she is a sweet kind person, they become friends and Gertrude reveals a mark on her arm which had been bothering her. It was in the exact same place where Rhoda had grabbed her in the nightmare, and it appeared on the same night. Rhoda didn’t tell Gertrude about the dream as she feared she would loose her new found friend.

Gertrude Experimented with lots of cures, both scientific and magical. None worked and the mark got worse. She went to see a conjurer who told Gertrude it was Rhoda who inflicted the wound. Gertrude and Rhoda stopped talking, and six years later Gertrude still hadn’t got rid of the mark. During the six years Mr. lodge had grown less fond of Gertrude and her arm.

Rhoda's son had been accused of arson and was set to be hanged.

Coincidentally Gertrude had been told that if she rubbed her arm over a freshly hanged mans neck her blood would " turn" and she would be cured.

She had no clue that the boy she rubbed her arm on was Rhoda's son, that is until she turned around to see Rhoda and Mr. lodge standing behind her she realized who it was and died of shock.

In sharp contrast " the Test" is a twentieth century crime story set in urban America. Benjy Blesker, a teenage boy who had been " falsely" accused of stabbing another boy to death in a gang related brawl. His father hired a well respected lawyer named Vernon Wedge who proved to be anything but affordable yet worth every penny. Although the case starts badly, Vernon finds an Extremely sensitive test which can show if the blade had ever made contact with blood.

As it was only found just in time for the last hearing it was disallowed because the defense had no time to prepare for new evidence. However Vernon had intended on this happening as he himself was not so sure about the boys innocence. He instead told the court how keen Benjy was to have the test done in court and no guilty man would. The jury voted him innocent.

Hardy describes a nineteenth century rural scene in the opening pages of his story. The dialogue alone subjects that it was written in the nineteenth century

" The cows were in full pail"

" He do bring home his bride tomorrow"

" Years younger than he they say"

When this dialogue is compared with that of today it is clear that the story was set at least a hundred years ago.

In the first few lines Hardy describes the milkers and milkmaids.

" An old milkman in a long white wropper and with the brim of his hat tied down....."

Aside from the fact that milking by hand is laughed upon these days, the quick description of what they were wearing is enough to tell you that these people were not from this century.

From the opening lines of " The Test" it is clear that a crime story is about to unfold and an urban setting is gradually established.

" I know why youre here, my phones been ringing all morning. Four newspapers, a youth worker, even a settlement house."

" He said wearily, pointing to the leather chair in his office"

" I came from prison this morning"

Sleaser describes the situation Benjy's father is in and in doing so sets the scene perfectly. He mentions many things which only existed recently in the first few lines so you know the story is set in the present time. This Gives the reader a lot of information about the story in very few words which makes the reader want to read on. As the story goes on Sleaser explains

what happened to benjy through Vernon. While he is describing what happened to Benjy he is also describing what sort of place the story is set in.

" Your boy is accused of knifing another kid in the street. That's what happened."

" Theyre all good boys until they start running with a street pack, then theyre something else"

He talks about Street gangs and knifings which is commonly associated with big cities.

When you add this information to the offices and attorneys previously mentioned there is too much pointing to an urban setting to deny it.

In " The Withered Arm" Rhoda is described as " lorn", meaning abandoned and unhappy.

" The thin woman who had not spoken....."

Rhoda lives her life as a social outcast who receives colossal amounts of hurrasment and very little pity. She was a single mother and as this was uncommon in the nineteenth century she was seen and treated as an outsider. Even though it was because of her son that she was treated this way she still loves and takes care of him. However the boys father, Mr. Lodge takes no financial or emotional responsibility for him.

" She was with Mr. Lodge, what did he do?" Rhoda

" Same as usual" Boy

" Took no notice of you?" Rhoda

" none" Boy

Mr Lodge doesn't want anything to do with his illegitimate son, he treats him like a stranger and regards him as an embaessment. He feels so embarresed about his son he doesn't even tell his new wife about him.

" how that poor lad stared at me" Gertrude

" I saw that he did" Mr. Lodge

" He is one of the village?"

" I think he lives with his mother a mile or two off"

In contrast to Farmer Lodge, Benjy's father is extremely supportive and does everything in his power to get the best lawyer he can for his son.

" I have money, the family, we all got together. I run a fuel oil buisiness; I'm selling the big truck. I can pay what you ask Mr. Wedge."

Benjy's father, Mr. Blesker begs pleads and tries everything he can to get Vernon to take the case.